THE THREE BUDDHIST JEWELS IN RAKKRIPA/ROMANI

Some Reflections on an Attempt at Translation.

By Knut Heidelberg, June 15 2026.

In Pali, the Three Buddhist Jewels are expressed as:

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

These expressions are idiomatic. A literal translation would be: "To Buddha/Dhamma/Sangha refuge I go." Examining the grammar more closely, we understand the meaning to be: "I go to the Buddha/Dhamma/Sangha for refuge." Naturally, more elegant renderings are possible in English, but this is the fundamental sense of the expressions.

Rakkripa is one of Norway's national minority languages and belongs to the Romani people, also known as Tater. The language is known by several names, including Romani and Romani-rakkripa. If we also include the variety spoken in Sweden, it falls within the broader category of Scandoromani. How, then, might the Three Jewels be rendered in Rakkripa?

The Pali word saraṇa presents a particular challenge, as Rakkripa appears to lack a fully satisfactory equivalent. One characteristic of Rakkripa is that vocabulary and grammatical structures have gradually been lost over time. Today, it is a mixed language, or what linguists refer to as a Para-Romani variety. Consequently, some degree of paraphrase is necessary. I have arrived at two possible suggestions.

The first is:

Mero råddrar kjeri te Buddha
Mero råddrar kjeri te Dhamma
Mero råddrar kjeri te Sangha

This may be translated as:

"I seek my home with the Buddha/Dhamma/Sangha."

Here, I employ the metaphor of "seeking home" as an expression of taking refuge.

My second proposal follows the Pali text as closely as I could manage and interprets saraṇa as "a good place". After all, places of refuge are places of safety and goodness. This yields:

Mero jar te Buddha, jai hårta stedo
Mero jar te Dhamma, jai hårta stedo
Mero jar te Sangha, jai hårta stedo

Which may be translated as:

"I go to the Buddha/Dhamma/Sangha, as good place."

There are several possible words for "good" in Rakkripa. The most common is probably latjo. However, latjo has also entered Swedish slang, and it may therefore appear somewhat inappropriate or colloquial when used in the context of the Three Jewels, which occupy an important place in religious practice. For this reason, I chose the more local word hårta instead.

It is also possible to form negative expressions that evoke the idea of a safe place, for example kji trasj ("without fear"). One could therefore write:

Mero jar te Buddha jai kji trasj stedo.

However, this introduces additional elements into the formula and disrupts the rhythm if the Three Jewels are to be recited orally. For this reason, I ultimately chose hårta stedo—"a good place"- as a substitute for saraṇaṃ.